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ANSWERING AL-QAEDA:
THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS IN THE MIDDLE
EAST

by

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Abstract

Since the terrorist group al-Qaeda began conducting operations against the United States and its allies, Osama bin Laden has mounted a concurrent media attack with anti-U.S. statements and religious pronouncements (*fatwas*), placing blame solely on U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. has left these accusations largely unanswered in the Middle East, allowing an increasingly frustrated Muslim public access only to a radical point of view. President Bush's recent efforts to bolster public diplomacy—the communication of U.S. interests and ideals to foreign publics—have fallen short in reaching moderate Muslims in nations at risk of succumbing to radical Islamists. In analyzing various models of terrorist systems, their members, and potential influences on those members prior to their turn toward radicalism, some clear opportunities to employ information in the war on terror emerge. U.S. State Department websites emphasize America's religious tolerance but include few messages touting the rationale behind our policies. Radio Sawa, the State Department's public diplomacy flagship in the Middle East and the successor to the Voice of America, focuses nearly exclusively on MTV-style programming and little on substantive reporting and analysis. We must re-introduce a message that answers the allegations from al-Qaeda and participate in radio or in televised debates, interviews and other mediums that allow moderate Muslims access to pro-U.S. political discourse. The modernizing forces in the Middle East—educated, moderate Muslims—are our natural allies in the war on terror. Our public diplomacy

campaign needs to reestablish strategic aims and retake the hearts and minds field to gain their support.

Introduction

“Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news, inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action.”

— The Koran (49:6)¹

Background

Immediately following September 11, Americans were horrified by many of the popular responses to the attack that were televised: hundreds of Middle Easterners and North Africans literally danced in the streets, celebrating the successful assault on U.S. prestige and power. The 2002 Pew Global Attitudes survey showed that in the Middle East, positive views of the U.S. have declined significantly from 1999/2000 levels. Positive ratings of the U.S. in Turkey have dropped by 22 points in Turkey to 30 percent; in Egypt, only 6 percent of the public have a favorable view of the U.S. Pakistan’s favorable rating has dropped from 23 to 10 percent². A February 2002 Gallop poll found that by a margin of two to one, residents of predominantly Muslim nations had an unfavorable opinion of the U.S. Even in Kuwait, where one would expect significant gratitude after the Gulf War, only 28 percent had a positive view of the U.S. In Saudi Arabia, one of our staunchest allies in the region, only 18 percent had a favorable opinion of the U.S.³ The conception that the U.S. and its foreign policies are roundly hated by a significant percentage of the Near East has been difficult for many Americans to internalize, and even more challenging to construct a feasible campaign plan to combat it. Misconceptions among the Middle East population are legion, and the U.S. is doing little to counter the negative perceptions that abound throughout much of the region.

Influence Campaign as Adjunct to Military Operations

Why should we care? After all, the highly-visible members of al-Qaeda who died on September 11 were of middle class, upper middle class, or even wealthy backgrounds, like bin Laden himself. None had known the customary deprivations experienced by the vast majority of those who comprise the Arab “street”. The answer is that this is the pool from which al-Qaeda will recruit its next generation of terrorists, and from which it will garner the bulk of its support, both moral and tangible. These are the people who will teach in the *Madrassas* and in the local universities, who will control the media and write the books and scholarly literature that will shape the minds of the populace, including the enormous “youth bulge” comprising over 50% of the population in the Middle East. It is they who will determine the nature of tomorrow’s political and Islamic discourse. While the U.S. effort to counter al-Qaeda must necessarily include a robust military element, a multi-pronged, coherent strategy must also include a vibrant public diplomacy thrust.

The U.S. has left bin Laden’s public accusations largely unanswered, allowing an increasingly frustrated Muslim public access only to a radical point of view. President Bush’s recent efforts to bolster public diplomacy—the communication of U.S. interests and ideals to foreign publics, the public face of traditional diplomacy—have fallen short in reaching moderate Muslims in nations at risk of succumbing to radical Islamists. The State Department’s singular focus on enhancing the U.S. image doesn’t address the widespread Middle Eastern distaste for American foreign policy—al-Qaeda’s central thrust in its informational war against Washington.

Organization

The paper consists of four parts. The first chapter will focus on the public diplomacy target audience, using the recent Rand study on *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism* and its deconstruction of terrorist organizations and individuals as a backdrop. Chapter 2 will include a discussion of Osama bin Laden's information mechanisms--public pronouncements and *fatwas* against the U.S. from 1996 to December 2001. The core of his public diplomacy campaign includes the following themes: 1) The U.S. is wholly responsible for the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the deaths of thousands of innocent Palestinians; 2) U.S. sanctions following the Gulf War have killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians; 3) The U.S. supports corrupt Arab regimes throughout the Middle East; 4) The U.S. troop presence on the Arab peninsula is a sacrilege; and 5) The U.S. and other Western "crusader" nations have waged barbaric wars on Muslim nations while Muslims have been wholly peaceable. These themes, or variations of them, resonate deeply with much of the world's Muslim community. Chapter 3 will focus on the message—U.S. counter-arguments to these accusations, with an emphasis on foreign policy advocacy. The fourth chapter will outline a plan of information attack, including recommended venues and mediums for relaying the message to the targeted publics; i.e. engaging in televised or radio debates/interviews on the television station al-Jazeera, Radio Sawa; purchasing time on additional Middle Eastern television and radio stations; contributing news articles to newspapers, web sites; and sending speakers and otherwise supporting educational forums in the Middle East and North Africa.

Notes

¹ The Koran, 49:6, translated with notes by N.J. Dawood, Penguin Group, 1999, p 363.

Notes

² Pew Research Center What the World Thinks in 2002; page 4

³ Charlotte Beers, Hearing on Public Diplomacy Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 11 2002

Chapter 1

The Target Audience

Who is the logical audience for our information campaign? The U.S. should seek to influence and deter the body politic of those at risk of turning to terrorism, or of supporting terrorist factions, as well as those among the most influential members of the various Islamic communities—the educated classes. We must also examine the evolution of a potential Islamic radical or terrorist, to identify likely points at which they are susceptible to moderate arguments and information.

Because al-Qaeda is a global institution, only a layered, phased approach to degrading its infrastructure can bring lasting results. The immediate challenge is largely military--to neutralize its ability to plan and execute terrorist attacks; mid-term responses should focus on targeting pockets of al-Qaeda members and trainers in conflict zones. But is only by challenging al-Qaeda's misrepresentation of world events, history, and the Koran that will inflict long-term strategic damage on the group.¹ As long as it faces no challenges to its ideology, al-Qaeda will continue to recruit sufficient members.

Terrorist Organizations as a System

While committed terrorists such as Osama bin Laden might only be deterred with great difficulty and with no guarantee of success, others in the al-Qaeda system are more susceptible to influence. System analysis of al-Qaeda, as outlined by Paul K. Davis and

Brian Michael Jenkins in the Rand study *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism*² shows several actors in the terrorist system that may be more open to deterrence, particularly those who provide moral and overt support, finance and external supplies. I posit that such deterrence may be employed through informational, not just coercive means.

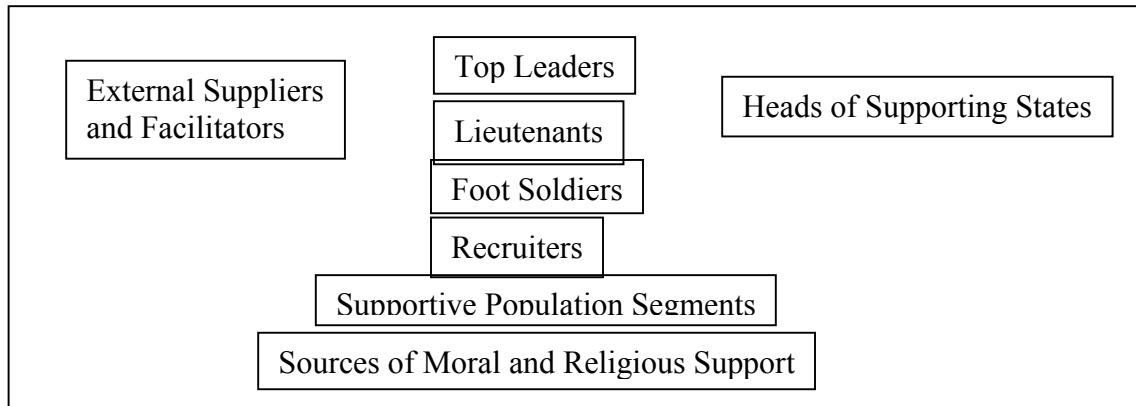


Figure 1.1 Actors in a Terrorist System

Davis and Jenkins also decomposed the terrorist system into various classes of influence on the minds and motivations of terrorists and those supporting them. The four quadrants include 1) influences related to U.S. physical power, 2) those related to the terrorists' perception of operational risk, 3) influences related to perceived threats those things the terrorists hold dear, including risk to family, power, wealth, and the overall cause, and 4) to terrorist motivations.³ It is this quadrant—identification of and attacking the “root causes” of the terrorist activities—that most lends itself to informational influence. But success will largely depend on whether we can reach the subject while he or she is still at least undecided per the radical cause and still open to new ideas—arguably a narrow window of opportunity. The most likely opportunities will occur in the academic environment.

The 1999 government report on profiling terrorists outlined the process of joining a terrorist group.⁴ The type of terrorist who operates effectively in the west is more often than not well-educated, with skills that enable him or her to survive there. Educated youths were motivated far more by idealism, as well as genuine political or religious convictions. Usually the disenchanted youths engaged in occasional protest and dissidence, beginning as sympathizers of the terrorist group. Recruits often came from student activist groups, moving from sympathizer to massive supporter. Often, violent encounters with security forces motivated a sympathizer to join the active ranks.

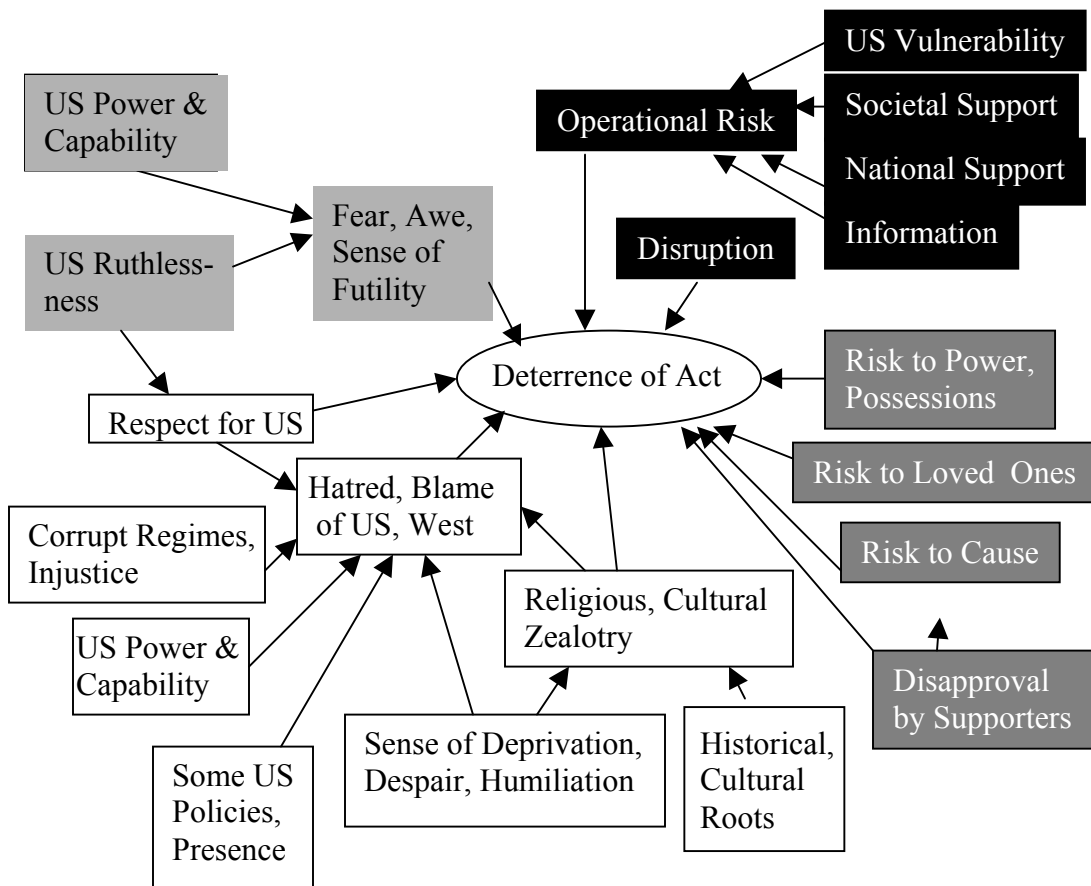


Figure 1.2 Classes of Influence

While sources of discontent and radicalism will be discussed at length in Chapter 2, al-Qaeda's information campaign, a synopsis of the key issues should be made here. The bulk of al-Qaeda's publicized messages deal with U.S. foreign policy. The organization has focused on several themes that resonate with the Arab public, including U.S. culpability for Iraqi civilian deaths as a result of sanctions; U.S. support of repressive regimes in the Middle East; historic western aggression against Moslems; U.S. military presence on the Arab peninsula; and U.S. support of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Terrorist Life Cycle

Decomposing the systems further leads to a review of the life-cycle process of individual terrorists.⁵ Davis and Jenkins note that the individual begins the cycle disaffected in some general way, not necessarily as a result of poverty (most of those known to be al-Qaeda members come from middle class or even wealthy backgrounds), but from other sources. Further in the progression, the individual is exposed to new, radical ideas that originate from a variety of sources. Throughout this process, the opinions of kin and friends play a role in shaping the minds of maturing youths; other mechanisms include media, schools, youth organizations, and eventually university faculty and Islamic organizations. The individual filters, even tests these ideas. If acceptable, the individual would choose or accept recruitment into an active role in a radical or terrorist organization. Figure 1.3 is a simplistic depiction of the process of radicalization, but it provides a framework in which opportunities to influence emerge.

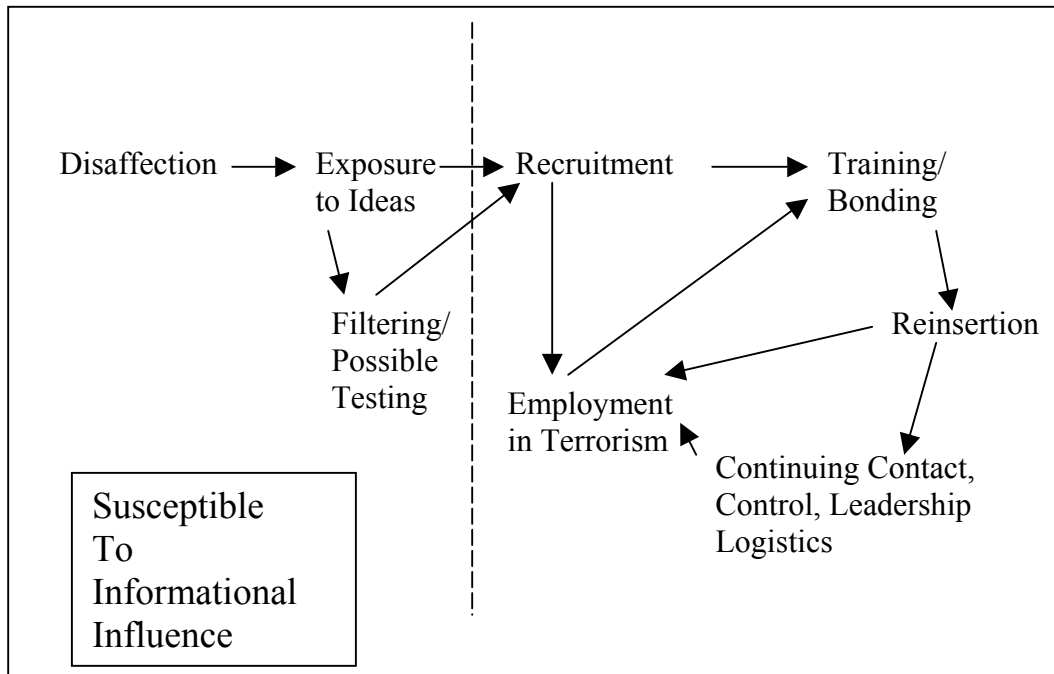


Figure 1.3 Life-Cycle Process of Individual Terrorists

Influence Methodology

Limited resources will dictate that we prioritize the target set. We can't reach 100 percent of the Middle East population for a variety of reasons, including the subjects' own access to media and other informational means (see chart 5.1). Those who have been recruited or employed to any degree by a radical group, or strongly support a radical agenda, should be considered a lost cause per a strictly informational campaign (though coercive methods may prove a credible deterrent). Breaking down the target audience into three categories along a continuum of support for U.S. foreign policies—hard support, soft support, and undecided—may prove of benefit in prioritization. Research shows that it is six times more expensive and difficult to move “undecided” consumers to the category of “soft” support than it is to change “soft” supporters into “hard” supporters.⁶ Certainly this research provides some insights as to why bin Laden's

information campaign has resonated with the Arab community with a minimum of effort. His target audience may be characterized as “soft” supporters of al-Qaeda who are far more easily influenced than the “undecided” or “slightly pro-U.S.” segment the U.S. is trying to sway.

Obviously the U.S. should identify population segments that are potentially supportive of America and need further encouragement as well as the youth in Arab and Muslim countries.⁷ Polling data indicates that while majorities in the Middle East view U.S. foreign policy negatively (see Chapter 2 for details), the situation is far from hopeless. A recent survey by NFO Middle East and Africa in one of the most conservative nations in the region—Saudi Arabia--reflects a society in evolution. Eight percent of those polled considered themselves “modernists.” Only eight percent thought of themselves as “disaffected.”⁸ Zogby polls in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon and UAE show strong favorable attitudes, especially by the young, toward American “Science and Technology,” “Freedom and Democracy,” “Education,” “Movies and Television,” and had largely favorable attitudes toward the American people (vice American policy). There is a significant element of Moslem society, therefore, that is potentially open to American public diplomacy efforts, particularly along the vectors given favorable rankings.⁹

Perhaps the greatest opportunities lie in the academic communities and religious schools of the Middle East and in some Western universities. Most attend such schools in their teens or early twenties, when young people are searching for relevancy and meaning, joining youth and religious organizations, and coming into contact with leaders in theology and academics. Ironically, though we expect the majority of tomorrow’s

Middle Eastern political leaders to emerge from a university setting, academia has also served as an incubator for Muslim radicalism. It is here, among the youth, that the most important influence battles must be fought.

Notes

¹ Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror, Rohan Gunaratna, Columbia University Press 2002, p 14.

² Rand Deterrence & Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda, Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins p 15.

³ Davis and Jenkins p 17.

⁴ Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why: The 1999 Government Report on Profiling Terrorists, Rex A. Hudson, The Lyons Press, 1999, pp 36-37.

⁵ Davis and Jenkins p 19.

⁶ Public Diplomacy and the War on Terrorism, Peter G. Peterson, Foreign Affairs, September/October 2002, p 82.

⁷ Peterson, p 91.

⁸ Saudi Arabia: Opposition, Islamic Extremism, and Terrorism, Anthony Cordesman, 27 Nov 2002, Center for Strategic and International Studies, p 12.

⁹ What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns, Chapter 7, How Arabs View the World, Zogby International, September 2002, n.p. <http://interactive.zogby.com>

Chapter 2

Al-Qaeda's Information Campaign

“How can a man in a cave out-communicate the world's leading communications society?”

— Richard Holbrooke, former U.S.
Ambassador to the United Nations¹

Core Messages

In Osama bin Laden's “Letter to the American People,” first printed in English in November 2002,² accusations against the U.S. fell into five general categories³:

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

...The blood pouring out of Palestine must be equally revenged. You must know that the Palestinians do not cry alone; their women are not widowed alone; their sons are not orphaned alone...you have supported the Jews in their idea that Jerusalem is their eternal capital, and agreed to move your embassy there. With your help and under your protection, the Israelis are planning to destroy the Al-Aqsa mosque, to pollute it as a preparation to capture and destroy it...we also call you to not continue your policy of supporting the Jews because this will result in more disasters for you.

U.N. Sanctions and Iraqi Civilian Deaths

You have starved the Moslems of Iraq, where children die every day. It is a wonder that more than 1.5 million Iraqi children have died as a result of your sanctions, and you did not show concern...

...despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, in

excess of one million...despite all this the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation.

U.S. Crusades Against Moslems

You attacked us in Somalia; you supported the Russian atrocities against us in Chechnya, the Indian oppression against us in Kashmir, and the Jewish aggression against us in Lebanon...history will not forget the war crimes that you committed against the Moslems and the rest of the world; those you have killed in...Afghanistan, Somalia, Lebanon and Iraq will remain a shame that you will never be able to escape. It will suffice to remind you of your latest war crimes in Afghanistan, in which densely populated innocent civilian villages were destroyed, bombs were dropped on mosques causing the roof of the mosque to come crashing down on the heads of Muslims praying inside.

U.S. Support of Corrupt Middle East Governments

Under your supervision, consent and orders, the governments of our countries which act as your agents attack us on a daily basis; these governments prevent our people from establishing the Islamic *Shariah*, using violence and lies to do so. These governments steal our *Ummah's* wealth and sell them to you at a paltry price. These governments have surrendered to the Jews, and handed them most of Palestine, acknowledging the existence of their state over the dismembered limbs of their own people. The removal of these governments is an obligation upon us, and a necessary step to free the *Ummah*, to make the *Shariah* the supreme law and to regain Palestine. And our fight against these governments is not separate from our fight against you.

U.S. Military Occupation of the Arabian Peninsula

Your forces occupy our countries; you spread your military bases throughout them; you corrupt our lands, and you besiege our sanctities, to protect the security of the Jews and to ensure the continuity of your pillage of our treasures...we...advise you to pack your luggage and get out of our lands.

Bin Laden had espoused this message in a 1997 interview with Peter Arnett and Peter Bergen in Afghanistan:

The country of the Two Holy Places has in our religion a peculiarity of its own over the other Muslim countries. In our religion, it is not permissible for any non-Muslim to stay in our country. Therefore, even though American civilians are not targeted in our plan, they must leave. We do not guarantee their safety.⁴

Much of bin Laden's message, though not necessarily its violent radicalism, finds a sympathetic ear in the Arab world. In the September 2002 Zogby Report, pollsters interviewed over 3,800 Arab adults from eight countries (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia). Respondents were asked 92 questions that covered their values, political concerns, mood, outlook, self-definition, and how they viewed the world. Several of the questions asked included what the U.S. could do to improve its relations with the Arab world. The category eliciting the most responses was the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and U.S. foreign policy toward Israel and Palestine in general. Overall, between 25 and 53 percent of the responses from eight Arab countries identified Palestinian issues, including recommendations such as "put limits on Israel," "recognize a sovereign Palestinian state," "sanction Israel," and "stop murdering the Palestinians." Another 15 percent to 40 percent advocated options dealing with relations with the Arab world, including "lift sanctions from Iraq," "withdraw American presence from Arab countries," "respect Arab countries," "respect human rights of Arabs," and "improve its policies toward Arab world," among others.⁵

Mediums of Choice

Al-Qaeda's use of the media emphasizes its understanding of modern communications and the organization's truly global reach. Its media and communications committee is responsible for disseminating al-Qaeda news or information in support of its operations. An al-Qaeda press office for Europe was

reportedly established in London in 1994, operating under the cover of the Advice and Reformation Committee. Al-Qaeda also publishes an Arabic daily newspaper, *Nashrat al-Akhbar* (Newscast) and a weekly report about the terrorist group, Islam in the world, jihad, and other issues.⁶ The independent Arab-language network al-Jazeera has been a favorite al-Qaeda medium; not surprising considering the huge number of subscribers to the satellite channel in the worldwide Arab community and its lack of oversight by Middle East governments at odds with bin Laden's efforts. Al-Jazeera newsmen were treated to an exclusive interview with bin Laden in 1998. Al-Jazeera was also the primary conduit for his defiant messages to the world during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda members have repeatedly dropped off cassette and video tapes at the network bureau for broadcast, including the most recent tape which confirmed bin Laden survived the war.

Bin Laden has also employed the Internet, establishing web sites in China—maalemaljihad.com--and Pakistan—maalemaljihad1.com--with a U.K.-based webmaster. His "Letter to the American People" justifying jihad against the U.S. first appeared online in Arabic and was translated and published in Britain in November 2002. His two-hour-long propaganda tape, which circulated around the Middle East several months before the September 11 attacks, included bin Laden's and his al-Qaeda members' impassioned speeches about western atrocities against Moslems worldwide. Rants were laid over graphic taped footage depicting such abuses, including extensive coverage of Israeli soldiers attacking Palestinians. This tape was widely distributed on the Internet.⁷

Bin Laden's dissemination of *fatwas* is an important element of his influence operations, serving as official justification for his terrorist operations. He issued decrees

in August 1996, February 1997, and February 1998, faxing them from exile in Afghanistan to other countries, including England, where Arabic-language newspapers reprinted them and transmitted the articles throughout the Middle East.⁸

Osama bin Laden has a strong grasp of 21st Century communications technology and a clear vision of the religious ideology he promotes via those media. His operatives and supporters have the technical expertise to make it happen. Most importantly, he knows his audience and plays on existing prejudices and fears. Our response to his influence campaign must make the same smart choices.

Notes

¹ Peterson, 85.

² The Observer International on line; www.observer.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,845724,00.html, 24 November 2002.

³ Reeve, 294

⁴ Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden, Peter L. Bergen, Touchstone 2002, 20.

⁵ What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns, Zogby International, Commissioned by the Arab Thought Foundation September 2002, First Printing: Sept 2002, Ch 11, 1-8

⁶ Gunaratna, 84.

⁷ Bergen, 20.

⁸ Ibid., 27-29.

Chapter 3

Designing the U.S. Message: Answering Al Qaeda

The Western media do not seem to have the slightest clue about the information revolution that is transforming the balance of power in the Arab world...

—Fatima Mernissi
Islam and Democracy¹

Some question the value of public diplomacy in winning American wars and achieving strategic aims. Integrating public diplomacy into U.S. foreign policy isn't done simply to enhance American popularity, or forge international consensus for our objectives. Public diplomacy is important because foreign attitudes and understanding can affect the success or failure of initiatives.² For example, Saddam Hussein's information campaign against U.N. sanctions was extremely effective, complicating U.S. efforts to enforce or bolster sanctions.

In Bosnia and Kosovo, Milosevic's influence operations were far more successful than NATO and U.S. efforts. Thanks to his pro-active approach, NATO played a continual game of catch-up in responding to Serbian media reports of Albanian terrorism and accusations of NATO bombing civilians. The result was strong Serbian public support for Milosevic and his repressive policies, and weak international support for NATO. While Milosevic was unable to stave off outside intervention, his perception

management campaign did succeed in helping to preserve Serb sovereignty over Kosovo under UNSR 1244.³

The U.S. was far more successful in its information campaign in Iraq in the first Gulf War; a combination of radio broadcasts and leaflet dispersal contributed greatly to massive Iraqi regular army surrenders and to the brevity of the ground war. Historically, the U.S. has tended to employ public diplomacy reactively, rather than as a core element of foreign policy and strategy. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Edward R. Murrow, President John F. Kennedy's U.S. Information Agency (USIA), is said to have observed that USIA should be in on the "takeoffs" and not only for the "crash landings."⁴

Current U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East

The U.S. State Department is the agency most responsible for designing, constructing and delivering a response to al-Qaeda—a challenging task considering Moslem public opinion of the U.S. Thus far, there has been little or no official effort to respond directly. In June 11 2002 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Charlotte Beers, the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, shared the State Department's three strategic themes shaping its efforts: shared values, the opportunity for democratization, and education through an initiative called "Partnership for Learning." She later described the strong dislike, if not hatred of the U.S., as being "bred in ignorance, misperception and misrepresentation." Opinion polls in the Middle East support this statement. However, the primary thrust of the State Department's information campaign is designed to highlight the cultural overlap between American values and those of the Moslem world and the Middle East.

An essential element of a public diplomacy campaign is determining the target audience's opinion. The U.S. government spends only \$5 million annually on foreign public opinion polling, only a fraction of the \$6 billion spent by the American private sector.⁵ Attitudinal research is also the only way of pinpointing societal segments vulnerable to informational campaigns and those most in danger of being radicalized, and of designing and determining measures of effectiveness of the influence operations.

The State Department stood up the Middle East Radio Network, known in Arabic as Radio Sawa, in spring 2002. Replacing the Voice of America (VOA) radio station, Radio Sawa's initial focus appears designed solely to increase VOA's "market share" of the youthful Arab world's listening population. Its Arabic-language MTV-like pop music format and programming, with twice-hourly bursts of world news, have attracted a large following—in fact, it's the number one station among youth in Kuwait, Jordan, and the Gulf states⁶--but is curiously devoid of critical current events analyses, debates, and U.S. foreign policy discussion. Radio Sawa plans to incrementally add more opinion-focused programming, including call-in discussions about U.S. foreign policy and news stories focusing on youth, women's issues, and health.⁷

Other new initiatives designed to reduce misunderstanding and build a common foundation of trust include the development of mobile, multimedia "American Rooms," with Internet connections and other information resources which can be placed in academic locales worldwide, especially the Middle East. Via these rooms, a viewer/listener can see small-town America, listen to the recitation of the Declaration of Independence, or hear music.⁸ Muslim life in America is another key focal point. In a \$15M advertising campaign, five videos were developed depicting the lives of American-

Muslims, and were shown on satellite stations and government-controlled television. When asked whether these advertisements would have the desired effect on Muslim communities and Middle Eastern audiences, Hussein Haqqani, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said,

...the fact is, they're answering a question that is not even being asked. No one in the Muslim world who criticizes the United States says that the U.S. does not have good values within the United States. The issue always has been what values do the U.S. project outside and abroad. And the four major criticisms of the U.S. in the Muslim world are: U.S. support for Israel; second point is that the U.S. is only interested in Arab oil, but not the Arab people; and that the U.S. supports unpopular and despicable regimes in the Muslim world. And the fourth usually is that the values the U.S. promotes within the United States, it does not make available to the rest of the world. None of those criticisms of course, is being answered here...I have never seen an al-Qaeda statement that says that we should wage war against the United States because the United States does not allow Muslims to wear *hijabs* within the U.S. The issue is, why does the U.S. maintain forward military presence in the Arab world? That issue has to be addressed. Why does the U.S. support Israel? Why does the U.S. not promote democracy in the Muslim world? Those are the questions that remain unanswered.⁹

In January 2003, the State Department withdrew the ads.

Arab Views: What the Polls Say

Statistical evidence supports the anecdote above. The September 2002 Zogby poll asked respondents to rank various political issues, from civil/personal rights to health care, to the Palestinian situation. Of 10 political issues, respondents graded those associated with "Palestine" and "rights of the Palestinian people" as third and fifth respectively.¹⁰ Results clearly indicated that unfavorable Arab attitudes toward the U.S. were a function of U.S. policy toward the Arab world. Respondents had largely favorable attitudes toward Americans in general, and in some specific categories, as

referenced in chapter 1. However, they had extremely negative attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy toward the Arab world, Iraq and especially toward Palestine.¹¹

Table 2.1. How Arabs View U.S. Foreign Policy

	Lebanon		Jordan		Kuwait		Saudi Arabia		UAE	
	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav
US	26	70	34	61	41	48	12	87	11	87
	Morocco		Egypt		Israel					
	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav				
US	38	61	15	76	16	78				

Source: Report of Zogby International, *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns* (International Graphics, September 2002), Chapter 7, 1.

Why is the State Department neglecting the core emphasis in foreign policy promotion? Christopher Ross, former U.S. Ambassador to Syria and current Special Advisor to the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, provided a partial explanation in a January 16 2002 Brookings/Harvard-sponsored panel discussion: "...our first task is to make sure that our government's policies are understood for what they are and not for what other people are saying they are...but beyond that there is a much longer term effort needed to put those policies in a context, a context of American values..."¹² Undersecretary Beers further clarified the issue in a May 15 2002 forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: "The articulation of U.S. policy is vital. Of course we urgently need to pursue the path to peace, but I do believe that we have to create another conversation on a different level, deliberately outside of this intense dialogue."¹³ While the need for this type of "cultural diplomacy" is clear, it cannot replace the absolute requirement for an information campaign designed to meet the al-Qaeda misrepresentations of U.S. foreign policy head on.

The Arabic language is one of the most defining factors in determining Arab ethnicity, and provides a sense of unity to the worldwide Arab community of 300 million in 22 countries. The ability to speak Arabic fluently is consequently one of the key requisites for competent spokespersons in the U.S. public diplomacy realm. Former Ambassador to Syria Christopher Ross, a remarkable Arabic linguist, was lauded as the U.S.’ “secret weapon” in the information war in a Nov 6 2001 Time magazine article.¹⁴ Ross’ understanding of both the nuances of U.S. Middle East foreign policy, Arabic sensitivities, and the subtleties of the language were apparent during a fall 2001 taping of the al-Jazeera talk show “The Opposite Direction.”¹⁵ According to the al-Jazeera Washington D.C. bureau chief, Hafez Al-Mirazi, Ross was a hit with the pan-Arab audience, and the type of representative the U.S. should be cultivating in its public diplomacy efforts.¹⁶

The U.S. Message

Keeping the poll results in mind, we must re-focus the U.S. public diplomacy campaign on direct responses to al-Qaeda’s accusations. Much of the anti-U.S. rhetoric that provide fertile ground for bin Laden’s information campaign have come directly from the Arab and Iranian governments themselves, employing the U.S. as a convenient scapegoat when policies fail and their governments’ survival are at stake. Shut off from accurate data, and fed a constant diet of anti-American accusations, public opinion in the Middle East has grown increasingly hostile.

The following arguments support a pro-U.S. stance per a debate on bin Laden’s key propositions. The issues are complex and far from being as clear-cut as depicted here; therefore, the rationale in this section is one-sided in favor of the U.S. by design.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In recent years, the Arab world has made a great effort to distill U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East down to a single issue—its support of Israel. It has served as a grand tool to exploit xenophobia in order to justify repressive regimes and radical Islamic objectives. But the fact remains that regardless of the validity of the complaints, the Middle East's perception of Israel's occupation of Gaza and the Golan Heights, and its behavior toward the Palestinians in those areas, has become the single most dominant issue in Arab opinions of the U.S. We cannot escape the accusation that we are in fact “guilty” of helping Israel survive politically and militarily since its inception, initially due to our desire to counter balance Soviet Union support to many of Israel's neighbors. However, the U.S. has also made a concerted effort to deal fairly with both Israel and its neighbors. We can also make a strong case that America has made great efforts (though inconsistent) since the 1970s to negotiate a peaceful solution to this conflict, risking U.S. prestige and making hefty political and monetary investments in the process. Negotiating a compromise agreement has always been in the interests of America, because it has always wanted good relations with a stable Middle East.¹⁷

U.S. leadership of the peace process is necessary, but not sufficient in itself, to achieve success. America has the credibility, deep pockets for rewarding compliance and participation, and the military clout to serve as security guarantor. However, both sides must *want* to be coerced into agreement. Other players in the process, including Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, must play a mediation role as well.

From the 1970's until 2001, forging a peaceful solution to the issue was a significant policy objective of most administrations. Kissinger's fevered shuttle

diplomacy between Washington and Cairo in the mid-1970s was a cornerstone of the Carter administration, and the eventual 1977 Camp David accord was President Carter's crowning achievement. President Ronald Reagan viewed Middle East policy in general largely through the lens of the U.S. vs. Soviet rivalry, but renewed the peace process in the early 1980s following Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Reagan's Plan, spearheaded by Secretary of State George Schultz, opposed both Israeli annexation of the West Bank and Gaza and an independent Palestinian state. President George Bush Sr. initiated the 1991 Madrid peace conference, which served as the framework for much of the progress achieved during the Clinton administration. Clinton made an Israel-Palestine solution an extremely high priority during his term, sponsoring the Oslo Accords.¹⁸ In 2000, following the Oslo process and then during the Camp David II talks, the two sides came extremely close to, but ended without, an agreement. The promising effort died when relations became intolerably strained following Ariel Sharon's visit to Moslem holy places in Jerusalem and the resultant second *intifada*.¹⁹

Unlike his predecessors, President George Bush came into office reluctant to be dragged into the conflict, fearing that past failures had undermined U.S. prestige in the region. Deep divisions exist even within the administration; the State Department has advocated for a more immediate, active effort including involvement with Arafat, while the Secretary of Defense and the Vice President's Office have argued against launching a political process while violence persisted and with Arafat at the helm. They point to Bush's futile calls in April 2001 for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian areas as evidence that U.S. desires would be ignored, and at significant cost to U.S. credibility.²⁰ On 24 June 2002, President Bush set the terms of debate by insisting

that *intifada* violence stop before negotiations resume, and that the Palestinians choose new leadership and reform Palestinian Authority institutions. America would present its proposal only after these conditions had been met.²¹ Since then, there has been little progress, at least partially due to diversions such as the war in Afghanistan and the potential war with Iraq.

While much of the Arab “street” denigrates, or is unaware of, U.S. efforts to forge peace in the Middle East, Arab leaders publicly welcomed President Bush’s remarks in June 2002. Egyptian President Mubarak described the speech as “balanced to a large extent.” Jordan’s government described it as marking “the beginning of the end of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis.” Even Saudi Arabia discussed Bush’s initiative’s “positive elements, including a clear American commitment to finding a solution to the crisis in the Middle East.”²²

In the meantime, who pays the bills for the Palestinian Authority? The European Union—not the Arab world—is the largest donor of financial and technical aid to the Palestinians.²³ Conversely, Arab financial pledges to the Palestinian cause have often historically gone unpaid. A 1978 inter-Arab agreement promised \$250 million per year to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and \$150 million to a Jordan-PLO committee. Only Saudi Arabia paid its share. Forty percent of the budget for UN relief efforts for Palestinian refugees was paid by the U.S. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia was by far the Palestinian’s most significant donor, but when Arafat made his ill-advised decision to support Saddam Hussein after his seizure of Kuwait, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait dropped the PLO like a hot potato.²⁴

The U.S. has spent billions in fostering the peace process. Egypt receives \$2 billion in U.S. aid annually, for a grand total of \$50 billion since 1979 (Israel receives \$4 billion yearly). Washington also provided Cairo F-16 aircraft and Abrams tanks, replacing or supplementing its outdated Soviet equipment.²⁵ When Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, Washington awarded Amman \$300 million of military equipment, including 16 F-16 jet fighters, troop carriers, attack helicopters and other military equipment.²⁶

U.N. Sanctions and Iraqi Civilian Deaths

When Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright responded to accusations that the U.S. and the U.N. were responsible for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian deaths as a result of U.N. sanctions, she said it was a “price we had to pay.” Her statement not only struck many as callous, it reinforced the misconception that U.N. sanctions alone were responsible for a humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

Before beginning a more detailed look at how Saddam Hussein has succeeded in his anti-sanctions influence operation against the U.S., let’s look at the internal security environment as a backdrop to the argument. According to a 2002 International Alliance for Justice News service report, over the last 20 years, over 200,000 people have “disappeared” in Iraq and never heard from again.²⁷ Hundreds of thousands of others have been arrested and subjected to tortures but eventually were released or escaped, psychologically and/or physically scarred for life. The regime has legions of informants supplemented by electronic listening devices, but most Iraqis operate under the assumption that whatever they say will eventually reach the ears of the government—a wise *modus operandi* considering the penalties.

Following the Gulf War, and the Kurdish and Shi'ah uprisings, more than 250,000 are reported to have been killed in the government's counterattack, according to Middle East Watch.²⁸ In Ken Pollack's *The Threatening Storm*, he explains the lengths to which Baghdad has gone, and will go, to retain control. Following the Gulf War, the government began a systematic draining of the marshes that supported the rebellious Shi'ah in the south of Iraq. The marshes had become a sanctuary not only for the Shi'ah rebels, but for deserters from the Iraqi army. Baghdad built a massive system of canals to divert the waters of the Euphrates that supply the marshes. By the end of 1993, the regime had destroyed more than 4,500 square kilometers of wetlands, roughly 90 percent of the marshes.²⁹ They then burned the villages and poisoned the remaining water sources, destroying a way of life for several hundred thousand marsh Arabs and creating an ecological disaster, a plan outlined as early as 1989 in Iraqi documents discovered by Middle East Watch after the Gulf War.³⁰

Saddam and his supporters are the critical link in the humanitarian disaster in Iraq in several ways. He could have ended sanctions by simply stopping weapons of mass destruction programs, but is also culpable because of his greed, indifference to his people's hardships, and shortsightedness. Saddam has employed the sanctions—an example of unintended consequences from the U.S. perspective—as a highly effective additional means to maintain control. It is a tool that allows him to reach virtually every person in the country, a capability he did not have before sanctions were imposed.

The Oil for Food Program and the rationing system essentially placed distribution of life-sustaining supplies directly in the hands of the regime. Baghdad distributes its limited resources in a very selective manner, rewarding Saddam's loyalists and

withholding favor—and food—from those it perceives as enemies. Republican Guard soldiers, for example, are reportedly paid in U.S. dollars to cushion them from inflation. Security services receive pay increases and access to state stores that sell non-rationed items. The Shi'ah, on the other hand, are left to exist in misery; the Marsh Arabs were denied ration cards in order to starve them into submission—revolts are historically a rarity among truly desperate people living in subsistence conditions. Statistics indicate that the Shi'ah have the highest child mortality rates and the highest numbers of underweight children. Hospitals were closed or not rebuilt in Shi'ah areas after the *intifadah*. Rations—foodstuffs available or affordable only with ration cards--now provide nearly three quarters of Iraqi caloric intake. A refugee with family still in Iraq stated, “The need to have a ration card is a form of pressure on families to do what the government wants—for example, to go on a demonstration or to vote.” Ration cards are approved by the local Ba'th Party and can be denied for many reasons, including having a deserter or refugee in the family. Computerized lists of ration card holders allow Baghdad to maintain surveillance over those receiving aid.³¹

Greed for luxury items constitutes a significant drain on Iraqi state resources as well. Since the Gulf War, Saddam—his personal wealth estimated at \$6B by Forbes magazine--has built himself fifty new palaces, complete with gold-plated faucets and artificial rivers, lakes and waterfalls—which could have been used to alleviate Iraq's shortage of water and sanitization equipment.³² Security concerns drew much of Saddam's available budget as well, with approximately \$7.5 billion spent annually on Iraq's military.³³

The Oil for Food Program, instituted in 1997, eased humanitarian concerns but did not eradicate them. By 2000, Iraqi oil exports were on a par with pre-Gulf War figures—2.2 million barrels per day, compared with 2.6 million in 1989. Its revenues were \$17 billion, the same as in 1989. By April 1999, UNICEF had found that the program had halted the rise in malnutrition problems. Iraqi food rations have increased from 1,300 calories per day in 1993-1995 to more than the United Nation's target level of 2,400 per day. Much of the progress occurred in spite of Iraq, as the U.N. has constantly had to demand that Iraq purchase the nutrient-rich foodstuffs for children and nursing and pregnant women. In September 1999, Iraq had signed contracts worth only \$1.7 million out of \$25 million available and allocated for such nutritional supplements. Even when the regime was forced to purchase the supplies, it did not always distribute them. In May 1999, it was determined that only 48 percent of the medical supplies delivered to Iraq had been distributed. Graft is rampant—UNSCOM inspectors have discovered military warehouses overflowing with medicine and Iraqi ships carrying smuggled Iraqi pharmaceuticals have been intercepted transiting through Gulf waters. Baby formula being sold to Iraq under the Oil for Food Program is being smuggled throughout the Middle East by Baghdad. Simultaneously, the regime presented dying children to the media as victims of U.N. sanctions.³⁴

The Shi'ah have been the continuing victims of the sanctions and Saddam's efforts to use them as a control mechanism. Supplies go to the south last. Their hospitals have the worst shortages and their infrastructure the least repaired. A UNICEF survey of malnutrition in Iraq indicated that a disproportionate number of those who have died since the end of the Gulf War have been Shi'ah.³⁵

Many in the Middle East, and even the U.S., firmly believe that millions of innocent people have died in Iraq since the Gulf War, having heard only from Saddam or from those who accepted his regime's declarations as fact. There is no question that many people have died since 1991—certainly too many. In 1999, the Iraqi government released the data from a census conducted in 1997. The census indicated that Iraq's population had grown from 16.5 million in 1987 to 22 million in 1997, a whopping 33 percent over a ten year period. Baghdad claimed that had it now been for the sanctions, the population would have been 23.5 million, but that 1.5 million had died because of sanctions. But 33 percent is a hefty increase, particularly for Iraq. If we add back that 1.5 million to the 1997 total, it would indicate a population growth of 45 percent and ranked it among the fastest growing populations in the world. This is not the case, however; prior to the Gulf War its population growth was average for the region and actually slowing down (find pre-war figures). Further, the Iraqi figures themselves give the lie to Saddam's assertion; census data show Iraqi population growth rates remained stable over the past 30 years and the decrease in population growth asserted by the regime would not have been big enough to create the actual population increase had 1.5 million actually died (show statistics). Iraq is therefore significantly inflating its civilian cost estimates from sanctions.

But what are the true figures? According to Pollack, the most accurate figures come from Richard Garfield of Columbia University, whose methodology is labeled the current "gold standard." Garfield estimates that between August 1990 and March 1998, anywhere from 106,000 to 227,000 Iraqi children under five years of age died as a result of the war, sanctions, and the *intifadah*. Of that figure, roughly 25 percent were killed

during the Gulf War and the *intifadah*. Of that 25 percent—between 26,500 and 56,700—he estimates that between 1,000 and 5,000 Iraqi civilians died during the Gulf War. Therefore, the majority of that 25 percent almost certainly died during the *intifadah*, testament to the reports of Saddam’s brutality against women and children in the marshy south. The best estimate we have then is that roughly 135,000 to 150,000 Iraqi children died in the first seven years after the war—still a heavy cost given that the Gulf War itself probably caused no more than 10,000-30,000 Iraqi military casualties. But the fault, as well as the remedy, lies mostly with the nation that invaded its neighbor and then refused to honor the peace terms--Iraq.

Perceived U.S. Crusades Against Moslems

A review of U.S. foreign policy over the past 50 years shows the lengths to which America has gone to support the Arab world in international conflict, and how little the depiction of the U.S. as a crusader against Islam reflects the historical record. Since World War II, in 11 out of 12 major conflicts in the Middle East region, the U.S. has allied itself with the Muslim/Arab or moderate side. The most ironic example is U.S. support of *Mujahadeen* forces against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s, in which America provided funds and weaponry, including surface to air missiles, funneled through the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence organization directly to radical Islamic troops. In Somalia, in 1994, the U.S. sent 60,000 soldiers, airmen, sailors and marines to save Muslim Somalis from famine, and predatory local warlords. The operation—performed for purely humanitarian reasons--is assessed to have saved the lives of least 50,000 Somali Muslims, at a cost of 16 American lives. Since 1990, the U.S. has provided more than \$476 million to Somalia for humanitarian assistance

activities.³⁶ In the Gulf War of 1991, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia and its revered Holy sites, the U.S. assembled the largest military coalition in modern history, including an unprecedented force from the Middle East. Troops and airmen from Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait assembled to throw Baghdad out of Kuwait. The U.S. deployed more than 500,000 personnel, almost 1,400 fixed wing combat aircraft, and six carrier battle groups to Southwest Asia, and lost 148 lives in the operation.³⁷ After Washington was compensated from allied financial contributions, it absorbed costs of \$7.4 billion.³⁸ After Saddam's armies were ousted, the U.S. did not attempt to gain any control over Kuwaiti or Saudi oilfields, or use its leverage to force down oil prices.

U.S. efforts to assist Moslem victims of Serb aggression in Yugoslavia have consistently been misrepresented by bin Laden as genocide efforts against Moslems. When Bosnian Croats and Moslems declared Bosnia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, heavy fighting erupted between Bosnian Serbs and the Croatian/Moslem populations. Within a few weeks, Serbs controlled almost two thirds of Bosnia, and conflict, including Serb ethnic cleansing, continued. NATO peace-making actions, including an effort to deny airspace to primarily Serb military aircraft, included Operation DENY FLIGHT in the interim period between 1992 and 1995. From between 30 August and 14 September 1995, NATO's Operation DELIBERATE FORCE included an air campaign against Bosnian Serbs to protect NATO-designated safe areas for Moslem and Croats and, indirectly, force Bosnian Serb leader President Karadzic and Serbian President Milosevic to negotiate for peace. This mostly western force included air assets from all three U.S. services, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Holland, Greece,

Spain, France, and Turkey, flew more than 3,500 sorties, and delivered more than 1,000 weapons against Serb targets.³⁹ In December 1995, a peace agreement was signed in Paris, temporarily ending a war that had claimed more than 200,000 lives and made six million homeless.

In 1999, following Serb violence and repression against Albanian Moslems, NATO began Operation ALLIED FORCE to end Serb ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. In a 78-day period, the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and NATO allied forces flew more than 38,000 sorties against Serb troops. In early June, an agreement was reached that called for the withdrawal of all Serb forces from Kosovo, the return of Albanian refugees to their homes, and the introduction of a multi-national peacekeeping force into Kosovo.⁴⁰

In relatively minor military operations, the U.S. supported Arab Iraq against Persian Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, re-flagging Kuwaiti vessels with the U.S. flag and escorting them through the Persian Gulf beginning in 1987. In the 1956 Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal, the U.S. supported Nasser and the Egyptians at the expense of the British government. U.S. foreign policy has generally favored Muslim Pakistan over India. U.S. humanitarian operations in East Timor and Turkey have supported Muslim populaces suffering from the effects of civil war and earthquakes, respectively.

American good intentions have sometimes been misperceived or eroded due to being sucked into supporting one side against another in peacekeeping or humanitarian operations (including Somalia and former Yugoslavia). Following the Lebanese militia's systematic murder of Palestinian refugees at camps Sabra and Shatila in 1982, U.S. Marines were sent to Beirut to protect the Palestinian refugee camps and provide visible

backing for the embattled Lebanese government. In April 1983, Lebanese allies of Iran bombed the American embassy and fighting resumed in Beirut. Violence escalated, eroding the peacekeeping mission and drawing the U.S. onto the side of the Christian Lebanese militia.⁴¹ The American decision to train the Lebanese Christian militia triggered the perception that the U.S. had “chosen sides” in their favor and culminated in the *Hizballah* bombing of the Marine barracks in 1983.

The War on Terror, though effectively serving as much of the anti-U.S. fodder over the past 18 months, can more accurately be depicted as an example of U.S. restraint in the face of virulent attacks on civilians. Washington did not, despite extreme provocation, engage in indiscriminant warfare against the Muslim population in Afghanistan. Rather, in a series of press statements, President Bush repeatedly asserted that neither Muslims nor the Afghan people were to blame. He laid responsibility squarely on the shoulders of a radical offshoot group who had hijacked Islam for their own ends, and on the illegitimate government who harbored it. Washington instead overthrew the Taliban while trying to minimize civilian casualties (last estimated at fewer than 400), dropped food aid to the populace, turned power over to a broad-based government, and has begun a major nation-building effort in the aftermath of the war.⁴² In 2002, the U.S. spent more than \$700 million on rebuilding Afghanistan, though much of the money went for emergency measures such as refugee resettlement and food aid. In late 2002, Congress approved spending more than \$3 billion during the next four years for Afghanistan’s reconstruction. Approximately 9,000 U.S. troops remain there to coordinate this reconstruction and battle the remnants of the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces.⁴³

Perceived U.S. Support for Corrupt Middle East Governments

A common theme among Mideast academics, writers and journalists, as well as al-Qaeda, is perceived U.S. support of repressive governments in the Gulf and North African regions. The U.S. government's traditional desire for stability and friendly relations, conducive to ensuring oil and military access among other benefits, is often seen as far outweighing its publicized desire for global democracy. The facts are, however, that the U.S., with the exception of the upcoming Iraq campaign, has neither established nor taken down a government in the Middle East since the 1953 covert operation in Iran. While the U.S. did back the Shah, it did not endorse the violent suppression of the Iranian populace.⁴⁴ After the 1979 Iranian revolution in which U.S. hostages were taken, the U.S. did not try to replace the Khomeini regime with one more supportive of American interests; conversely, it has sought détente with Tehran over the years.⁴⁵ Even the potential action to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein will be a last-ditch effort--the result of over 10 years of Iraqi moves to evade sanctions and develop weapons of mass destruction. We must look elsewhere than the U.S. in the Middle East democratization blame game. According to Fawaz Gerges,

Economically and politically, the Arab Middle East is one of the regions left out in the world race to democratize and globalize. Authoritarianism and patriarchy are highly consolidated on every level of society, from the public sphere to the dinner table. These shortcomings, not U.S. foreign policies, are largely responsible for the lack of Arab development and progress...It is high time for the Arabs to take charge of their political destiny and fully embrace modernity. This process requires structural reform from within and total engagement with the world, including the eradication of terrorism.⁴⁶

One-party states continue to flourish in the Middle East and North Africa. In Freedom Houses' Freedom in the World 2002 annual survey on political rights and civil

liberties, only nine—19 per cent--of 38 Muslim majority countries were considered electoral democracies. Only two of 45 were ranked “Free.” Historically, the Middle East has seen virtual stagnation in its overall levels of freedom over the last three decades.⁴⁷ Women remain underrepresented in all political organizations, occupying only 3.5 per cent of all seats in parliaments of Arab countries, as compared to 8.4 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, 12.7 per cent in South-East Asia and the Pacific, and 21.2 per cent in East Asia.⁴⁸

Considering these factors, it would be extraordinarily difficult for the U.S to keep these repressive regimes in place, or control their media or fledgling electoral processes. The illogic becomes particularly salient when one considers the virulent anti-American tone of government statements in print and over the airwaves. If the U.S. had the intent to control, or the degree of power in the Middle East perceived by the populace, would we allow those accusations to be made? Further, according to the RAND study *Leadership Succession in the Arab World*, there is no evidence that the leadership in any Arab state has ever asked for assistance or guidance from Washington either in manipulating succession or even in discussing likely candidates for such succession. No matter how close a nation’s relationship with Washington, even with allied Arab states, processes of leadership succession are among the most closely held and jealously guarded prerogatives of current heads of state.⁴⁹

The U.S., of course, advocates presentational governance worldwide, and has spent \$250 million on democracy programs in the Middle East over the last decade.⁵⁰ To a very limited degree, it has experienced a few successes. On 3 December 2002, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Egypt’s leading human rights activist and a U.S. citizen, was released

from an Egyptian prison following U.S. threats to withhold additional foreign aid. Ibrahim had been convicted on charges of fraud, bribery and spreading false information, but his real crime was his outspokenness on the failure of Pan-Arabism and his championing of the democratic process and election monitoring. He still faces a retrial in Egyptian civil court. Publicly stigmatized by the conviction, at a recent conference on Islam and modernity, Ibrahim was been labeled by some as an “irrelevant stooge who gets Western money”—ironic considering that the Egyptian government receives \$2 billion in U.S. foreign aid annually and that all colloquium participants were on the bankroll of U.S. institutions.⁵¹ But regardless, examples of U.S. success in countering political repression in the region have been scarce.

The real reasons behind the survival of repressive regimes don’t lie at the U.S. door. Many Arab governments have repeatedly rejected steps toward reform, democratization and economic liberalization, fearing that such changes would affect their political survival. Another factor is the phenomenon of personal authoritarianism, in which individual leaders maintain a monopoly over economic and political power—arguably the dominant political system in the region today. Extremist ideology sponsored by the opposition, whether based on religion (radical Islam) or secular (Ba’athism) underpinnings enable governments to justify repressive measures against their populaces.⁵² Such extremism coupled with the non-democratic nature of many opposition groups offer a moderate constituency only a choice between two evils—an authoritarian regime versus an authoritarian theocracy—contributing to popular support of the status quo. Further, home-grown economic and political failures have generated popular anger which many governments prefer to direct externally, in an effort to shift

blame onto the U.S. and often Israel. The states' ownership and/or censorship of the media allow them to successfully conduct such "influence operations." Coupled with more overt means of control, such press controls have significantly hindered democratization for decades. By employing this systematic demagoguery, however, state leaders may box themselves into stances that inhibit economic and political growth.

Let's look at the case of Iraq, a fabulously oil-wealthy country whose regime grew stronger as its economy and living conditions failed catastrophically. In the 1970's and early 1980's, they had everything going for them—a relatively educated population, 112 billion barrels in their oil reserves (second only to Saudi Arabia), and relatively weak neighbors. Unfortunately, Saddam's irredentist designs resulted in an eight-year-long war with Iran, the devastating Gulf War with the U.S. and coalition forces, and its resultant U.N. sanctions—self-inflicted wounds later characterized in most of the Arab press and by its leadership as U.S.-inflicted.⁵³ In another example, after impoverished Syria supported the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia rewarded Damascus by giving them \$2 billion—which Assad promptly spent on Russian weapons.⁵⁴

The U.S. will still continue to encourage the growth of democracy, balanced with its own desires for stability and human rights in the region. On Dec 12 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced a new \$29 million Middle East Policy Initiative, stating that it "places the U.S. firmly on the side of change, of reform and of a modern future for the Middle East."⁵⁵ But in the end, the U.S. cannot impose democracy in the region—it must be generated from within. Middle Eastern leaders must construct their own style of democracy or political pluralism, tempering it with their country's cultural, religious, and social traditions as well as their desire for stability.

U.S. Troop Presence on the Arabian Peninsula

“When you prayed to your Lord for help, He answered: ‘I am sending to your aid a thousand angels in their ranks.’

—The Koran, 8:5⁵⁶

Allah’s angels were wearing Kevlar when they arrived in Saudi Arabia in 1990 to protect the world’s oil supply as well as the Kingdom and posture for the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, conquering the heart of the emirate within the first 24 hours. In the early morning hours of the first day, Iraqi forces stormed Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah’s Dasman Palace. The emir fled in a royal limousine minutes before the Iraqis arrived, escaping over the southern border to Saudi Arabia. His younger brother, Sheik Fahd al-Ahmed al-Sabah, was killed in the palace fire. Within 96 hours of the invasion, Iraqi armored forces had advanced to the border of Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷

On the evening of August 6, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, General Norman Schwarzkopf and a small group of high-ranking American officials briefed King Fahd and a small group of the King’s inner circle, including Crown Prince Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz. Secretary Cheney showed King Fahd satellite photographs of Iraqi troop dispositions near the Saudi border, emphasizing the size of the force as well as its proximity. It was a force far larger than needed to conquer relatively tiny Kuwait. And it could drive deep into Saudi Arabian oil fields within 48 hours. Following the briefing, and after discussing it with his advisors, King Fahd said, “One has to ask why Saddam Hussein creates these forces... It is not just his aggression against Kuwait... [He] aspires to something larger.” He then concluded with “the United States has no ulterior motive... If we were to do anything with our friends from America it would be only in

defense—not as aggressors... The most important thing is to protect our country.”⁵⁸ Bolstering the perception of threat to the Kingdom, a defector debriefed in late August told American authorities that the Iraqis had indeed planned to take Saudi Arabia. Apart from these factors, however, there is little evidence that the Iraqis actually planned to head south; within a matter of days the Republican Guards which had raced to the border were replaced by Iraqi infantry units who proceeded to build up defensive positions.⁵⁹ But at the time the decision was made to welcome American forces, it appeared there was a significant chance that Saddam’s troops might head south. And certainly they maintained the capability to do so at will.

King Fahd’s decision met with considerable domestic opposition from the Saudi religious clergy, the *ulema*, and its grand mufti, Sheikh “Abd al-Aziz bin Baz. However, bin Baz accepted the proposition after being shown satellite photos depicting Iraqi forces massed at the border. King Fahd assembled 350 *ulema* in Mecca to debate the issue, which resulted in the issuance of a fatwa issued by bin Baz:

Even though the Americans are, in the conservative religious view, equivalent to non-believers as they are not Muslims, they deserve support because they are here to defend Islam.⁶⁰

Bin Laden, who offered to mobilize veterans of the Afghan *jihad* against Soviet occupation to defend Saudi Arabia, was humiliated when he was turned down in favor of a U.S. force. The presence of the American troops, some of whom remained even after the end of the Gulf War, became one of bin Laden’s most bitter grievances against the West. The idea of having “infidel” forces standing guard over Islam’s most holy places is repugnant to him; the U.S. presence also complicates al-Qaeda’s efforts to topple the Saudi monarchy.⁶¹

Prior to the 2003 U.S. buildup of forces in the Middle East, about 5,000 American troops remained in Saudi Arabia, none in Mecca or Medina, the most important of the Kingdom's holy places. Their purpose was to deter Iraq from attacking Saudi Arabia and monitor the "no fly zones" in southern Iraq. Out of sensitivity to Saudi restrictions, concerns, currently the U.S. Air Force does not conduct ground attack operations from Saudi Arabia.

The presence of U.S. forces will remain a serious bone of contention with al-Qaeda. But his depiction of the circumstances—"occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people..." is inaccurate. Currently, the U.S. is the guest of the Saudi government, which pays for most of the logistical costs of hosting the troops. However, the U.S. provides gratis troops (most of whom are there on a temporary duty basis) and millions of dollars worth of equipment to protect the region.⁶² Should the U.S. not invade Iraq, their presence in Saudi Arabia will remain important in deterring Saddam from re-invading Kuwait and threatening the Kingdom. Further, removing troops while Saddam remains in power would appear to be a significant victory for al-Qaeda. The future of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia will depend greatly on the progress of the potential conflict in Iraq. Military leaders have stated that significant numbers of forces will be withdrawn from bases in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, once Saddam is ousted.⁶³

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Chapter 4

Designating the Medium: Media Options in the Middle East

It makes a hell of a difference when you say it in Arabic.

—Yosri Fouda
Deputy Executive Director, Al-Jazeera¹

Information in most of the Middle East is a tightly controlled commodity. Most newspapers, journals and television are directly or indirectly controlled by the leadership, apart from notable exceptions like the al-Jazeera network (though even it rarely criticizes its protector, financier, and landlord, the Qatari government).² According to the Annual Survey of Press Freedom 2002, none of the Arab/Iranian Middle East media institutions were ranked as “Free.” Kuwait and Jordan received “Partly Free” rankings, with self-censorship widely practiced to avoid prosecution under their respective penal codes.³ Self-censorship is prevalent throughout the Middle East, both because of the states’ power and influence and because writers often fear public opinion should they depart from mainstream ideology. Writers who air dirty (i.e. self-critiquing) political linen tend to be characterized as “Zionists,” or as western lapdogs. The U.S. is a safe, politically correct target. Many governments consider the fostering of anti-Americanism as a convenient method to distract attention from politicians’ own shortcomings and a handy way to mobilize the populace against an external foe.

Regional Media Trends

Because the U.S. has limited resources to devote to public diplomacy, it must not only carefully identify, prioritize and target its audience and message(s), but the means to get it there. Both modern technologies such as the Internet and more traditional means available in the Middle East such as radio programming and print media must be assessed. Media research data can vary rather widely; for example, The World Bank's World Development Indicator estimates of the Middle East on-line community is assessed at three percent⁴ while Pew research shows that eight percent regularly access the Internet. Percentages of the Middle East population employing "Old media" such as radios, television, and print media are contrasted with percentages of those using "New Media" such as online usage and personal computers, in the table below.

Table 5.1. Proportion of the Middle East Population Using New and Old Media

New Media		Old Media				
<u>Online Popul'n</u>	<u>PCs</u>	<u>Radios</u>	<u>TVs</u>	<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Mainline Phones</u>	<u>Mob Phones</u>
2000	1998	1997	1998	1996	1998	1998
3	6	39	25	11	19	8

Source: *World Development Indicators 2000*, The World Bank

The Internet

While the number of on-line users in the region is relatively small—an estimated 4.4 million, or 0.5 percent of Internet users worldwide⁵--the Internet is a relevant element of the information campaign. Al-Jazeera's website, www.aljazeera.net, is wildly popular, primarily with Arab-Americans. The website has recorded up to 1.2 million daily hits since 11 September, increasing to 3 million hits daily during the Afghanistan campaign.⁶

The dominant user group in the Middle East lies in the educated, 18-35 year old range, covering several of our public diplomacy targets—the young, educated and potentially influential. For an hourly fee, cybercafes provide public access to the Internet in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Tunisia, and the UAE.⁷ The significant question per public diplomacy on the Internet is the degree to which it influences mass public opinion, and how it does it—if at all. Little research or in-depth polling has been conducted to determine the cyber-culture--cultural leanings and values of Internet users--of the Middle East. However, extensive data collecting and analysis has occurred in the U.S. and Europe, which may establish a general pattern of cyberculture and its influences that we can apply elsewhere.

On balance, evidence gathered by the Pew Foundation in the U.S. and by the 1999 Eurobarometer within the European Union did not suggest that the experience of going online actually changed the attitudes and values of most adult users; rather it more likely reinforced existing perceptions. There is a strong self-selection process at work on the Internet, with users constructing and filtering their own bookmarked websites, subscribing to specific lists, and participating in select chat rooms. The Internet experience is, therefore, unlikely to convert a pro-al-Qaeda user to a U.S. sympathizer. However, cyberculture does provide a public space particularly conducive to progressive networks and alternative social movements. In the long term, socialization theory suggests that cyberculture will help shape the values of the children surrounded by this technology in their homes and schools.⁸ In other words, the public diplomacy on the

Internet might not have the impact we want on the current generation of adult users, but it may in the next.

Television Opportunities: al-Jazeera and the Arab Networks

Al-Jazeera, a Qatar-based Arabic-language independent satellite network, has received tremendous worldwide press—positive and negative--since the war against al-Qaeda began in 2002. Many of its staff have been trained in or have worked on television networks in the West; the BBC serves as the network's primary model. Its funding and support by the Qatar government have allowed it far more freedom than other Arab-owned news stations, challenging mainstream Arab opinion by debating extremely volatile Pan-Arab issues. Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, bankrolled the network to the tune of \$150 million from 1996 to 2001, and continues to fund it.⁹ Al-Jazeera's free debate, viewer participation, and live coverage, and controversial topics including sex, polygamy, women's rights, and regime corruption have revolutionized Arab network programming, reaching an estimated 35 million viewers. Approximately 70 percent of Arabs who own a satellite dish rely primarily on al-Jazeera for their news, giving the network a huge near monopoly on regional viewership.¹⁰

Few other Arabic-language networks have this luxury. Government control and influence over other Arab networks hinder their ability to inject social commentary and critique into their programming. These networks also fear the withdrawal of advertising funds by offended Arab corporations and businesses. Qatar, in fact, has continued to fund al-Jazeera past its 2001 deadline largely due to the network's inability to sell sufficient advertising to survive—a product of the antipathy aroused by the network's

controversial programming within the Middle East.¹¹ And while in 1998, only 25 percent of households in the Middle East owned television sets, today, approximately 70 percent of the more affluent Gulf country populations have regular access to satellite television, whether it's in the house or at cafes or neighbors' homes.¹²

Al-Jazeera journalists face similar restrictions, though not to the degree their compatriots do. Jordan and Kuwait both shut down al-Jazeera bureaus in 2002; Bahrain banned the network's journalists from visiting. Syria has refused to let the network open an office, and Libya withdrew its ambassador from Qatar in 2001 due to al-Jazeera's reporting. A few years ago, the Algerian government reportedly cut power in part of Algiers to prevent citizens from viewing an al-Jazeera program about the country's brutal civil war. U.S. officials have been annoyed about the number of network analysts who expressed anti-American views or attacked U.S. foreign policies.¹³ Interestingly, when the network hosted former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on one of its talk shows in 1998, and when it interviewed Foreign Minister Shimon Peres recently, Israeli officials praised the network for its professionalism.¹⁴ The Qatari government has refused to interfere with al-Jazeera's operations, repeatedly citing freedom of the press.

Al-Jazeera's performance is controversial. Its supporters characterize it as a reliable, professional, and informative news channel that reflects the perspective of its audience but which tries to present both sides of the story; its motto, "the opinion and the other opinion."¹⁵ U.S. officials have expressed concern about the network's serving as a mouthpiece for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, as well as what many Americans view as its editorial and reporting bias against the U.S. Arab journalists and viewers charge that U.S. journalism is at least as partisan against the Middle East. Many Americans would

argue that al-Jazeera's inflammatory reporting of the *intifadah* has done more than simply highlight the violence of the Arab-Israeli conflict—it has contributed to the radicalization of even moderate segments of Arab society worldwide. Televising the *intifadah* live, and from the Palestinian perspective, al-Jazeera has played a significant role in mobilizing support for the Palestinians.

But it can do more than politically mobilize the masses on a single issue. A station with al-Jazeera's huge audience, credibility and independence has tremendous potential to contribute to press freedoms across the region and to serve as an enabler of democratization. Open discourse and rational discussion can displace conspiracy theory and militancy, strengthening the mechanisms of civil society and the region's moderate population—and potentially open the door to a more measured response to U.S. information efforts. The State Department has recognized the network's impact on the worldwide Arab community, and has assigned at least one official per day to speak with the channel, according to al-Jazeera's Washington bureau chief, Hafez al-Mirazi. Al-Mirazi has already interviewed Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East William Burns, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.¹⁶ The U.S. must continue to focus on the influential al-Jazeera network in its public diplomacy campaign, fostering as close a relationship with its journalists as possible.

Another tactic is building rapport between the U.S. military and the network. On November 13, 2001, during the Afghan war, a U.S. missile accidentally destroyed al-Jazeera's Kabul office. No one was in the office when the projectile hit. Since the incident, the station has repeatedly argued that the attack was deliberate. The bombing

has—quite naturally--made the network particularly sensitive to U.S. military operations and suspicious of American motives. Establishing liaisons with al-Jazeera, consistently including them in military press conferences, and establishing a robust two-way dialogue between network and military public affairs personnel would at least ensure al-Jazeera's receipt of accurate information.

As a corollary, the U.S. government plans to revamp its external broadcasting strategy. Washington's 2004 budget request includes a project that will redirect the main thrust of official American broadcasting from Cold War era targets to the Middle East and Indonesia. The Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees all non-military U.S. international broadcasting, seeks approximately \$50 million in addition to its \$500 million budget to fund it. The new strategy seeks to establish a new Middle East Television Network in Arabic for \$30 million; press releases vow that the new channel will broadcast "accurate news and the message of freedom and democracy." Should this effort be funded, much of the hoped-for success will depend on the credibility of its news and reporting. But if it's perceived—rightly or wrongly—by the Middle East as a propaganda machine, it will fail.¹⁷

Beyond Radio Sawa

Nearly 40% of the population of the Middle East have at least a radio—still the most available means of mass communication in the region--in their home. The replacement of America's Arabic language VOA by Radio Sawa essentially shut down the only credible U.S. government-owned source of international radio news in the Middle East. VOA was one of a handful of international news sources, including BBC World Service Arabic Radio and the French-based Radio Monte Carlo-Middle East, which were listened

to by Arabs in times of crisis. During the first Gulf War, Kuwaitis living under the Iraqi occupation listened surreptitiously to BBC and VOA while the Iraqi media characterized the invasion as a Kuwaiti coup against a corrupt regime.¹⁸ Radio remains one of the most powerful tools in a public diplomacy campaign in the region.

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Chapter 5

Conclusions

Creating a viable, successful public diplomacy in the Middle East is an extremely difficult task. America must challenge long held, deeply felt prejudices in populations which have had little access to open information sources and which have been highly politicized against the U.S. Many in the target group are at risk of moving from the “moderate” camp to becoming supporters of more radical forms of Islam. Overt, obvious attempts to “control” regional media or broadcasting what may be perceived as propaganda, will do more harm than good to America’s image. Therefore, employing credible media outlets such as Al-Jazeera or even VOA-style (i.e. perceived as balanced by listeners/viewers) radio and television stations is essential. Web-based public diplomacy, though unlikely to change minds in the current generation, may reach the next, or at least help them become more susceptible to change. Targeting Arab and Middle Eastern youth through new and old media at universities, in civic and youth associations, and at religious schools, and focusing on messages that include robust discussions of U.S. foreign policy are central to the core of an effective public diplomacy campaign. Middle East student exchange programs are a golden opportunity to enhance regional understanding and advocacy on both sides. Arabic-speaking American diplomats and spokespersons should engage in talk shows, interviews, and debates to

explain and defend U.S. foreign policy. Responding directly to al-Qaeda's accusations must be part of that dialogue.

There are several enabling mechanisms that will enhance U.S. efforts. Educational and cultural exchange programs are key to success. Unfortunately, funding for these State Department programs fell more than 33 percent, from \$349 million to \$232 million from 1993 to 2001 (adjusted for inflation). As funding declined, Muslim populations rose dramatically. State Department exchanges with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen fell 21 percent; those with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and India declined 34 percent in this period.¹ Government institutions, including the State Department, are unlikely to be allocated the necessary funding; this year the State Department had hoped for \$200 million for its democratization and education initiative, but were budgeted \$29 million.² Academic and other civilian institutions may be preferable. The U.S. government's credibility in the region has been strained, particularly since the second *intifada*; therefore, a perceived non-partisan institution(s) such as the Carnegie Foundation may be a more effective option.

The U.S. campaign will still face challenges from Middle Eastern journalists with anti-U.S. leanings and conspiracy-theory mentalities. Encouraging the development of a more professional news cadre, and bridging cultural gaps, should be a central theme of the U.S. information campaign. A possible tactic to support a professional Middle Eastern journalist cadre is the establishment of journalist exchange programs with western news agencies and other media, as well as more journalism scholarships at American and other western academic institutions. Fostering relationships between the U.S. government and foreign journalists, and increasing their access to high-level

American officials and senior policymakers may help convince them that the U.S. government is committed to fostering a dialogue with the foreign press.³ Providing Middle East journalists access equal to western journalists' to U.S. military sources must be part of that effort.

Making a few, smart investments now, and ensuring that the messages we're transmitting are the right ones, via the right media, is a vital part of ensuring U.S. foreign policy decisions in the Middle East are understood, if not supported. The messages must reach the hearts and minds the Arab "street," as well as the educated youth, which could take politicization to new depths, including terrorism. Al-Qaeda must not go unchallenged in the realm of ideas.

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